

***DRAFT***

# Blackfoot Community Conservation Area

## Management Plan for the Core



**Photo by: Steve Kloetzel**

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# Executive Summary

The Blackfoot Community Conservation Area (BCCA) is an innovative effort involving community forest ownership and cooperative ecosystem management across public and private lands in the heart of the 1.5-million acre Blackfoot watershed. Located at the southern end of the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem, the BCCA borders the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat Wilderness Areas and encompasses an important transition zone between wilderness, national forest and productive valley bottoms, with lush riparian and wetland areas and important wildlife habitat. Generational uses of the area include livestock grazing, timber harvest, and recreational activities including hunting, trapping, horseback riding, hiking, snowmobiling and skiing.

The BCCA project involves two phases. The first phase involves local ownership and management of 5,609.37 acres of former Plum Creek Timber Company lands that will be transferred from The Nature Conservancy to the Blackfoot Challenge, also referred to as the BCCA Core. The second phase involves joining the Core with surrounding public and private lands to develop a multiple-use demonstration area for the watershed piloting innovative access, land stewardship and restoration practices across a 41,000-acre landscape. Land ownership is comprised of the USFS-Lolo National Forest, MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and a number of private landowners; a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will establish the legal framework for public agencies and private landowners to partner in cooperative cross-boundary ecosystem management.

The community vision for the BCCA Core is to:

*Develop a working landscape that balances ecological diversity with local economic sustainability for the future benefit of the Blackfoot Watershed Community. Management will entail activities that seek to conserve, enhance and maintain a balance of wildlife habitat, wetlands, water, grasslands and timber resources with traditional uses including hunting, recreation, agriculture, and forestry. These shared values for the land will be complimented through working cooperatively with the surrounding agency and private landowners.*

The BCCA Core will be managed and administered by the BCCA Council, a committee of the Blackfoot Challenge, consisting of 15 members that represent agencies owning land within or adjacent to the Core, private landowners, and recreational user groups, local businesses and commercial outfitters.

The purpose of this Plan is to guide land management decisions on the BCCA Core – the 5609.37 acres located in the heart of the Blackfoot Community Conservation Area. This document defines the community's vision for the property, characterizes the natural and cultural landscape, documents the public involvement process and administration of the property, and establishes management goals and objectives to guide conservation, restoration and stewardship activities.

Based on a number of social and biological assessments, eleven natural and community resources and uses are central to sustainable management of the Core, including: Wildlife, Forest & Forest Products, Fire, Riparian & Wetland areas, Range & Native Grasslands, Weeds, Recreation, Travel Management, Education, In-holdings & Neighbors, and Economics. Management goals and objectives are herein defined for each resource, to establish management guidelines, measurable targets and funding priorities to implement on-the-ground stewardship and restoration activities.

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By: Rich Lane & Associates of Camas Creek Enterprises, Inc. 2007
- D. BCCA Survey Results-Executive Summary
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## INTRODUCTION

### Background & History

The 1.5 million-acre (2,400 square miles) Blackfoot watershed in northwestern Montana is comprised of a diverse and ecologically rich combination of habitats due to its geologic and hydrologic features. Located at the southern edge of the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem, the Blackfoot is part of a ten million acre ecosystem that extends north to Canada. As a sub-basin of the Columbia River, the river flows a 132-mile course from its headwaters on the Continental Divide to the Clark Fork River, just east of Missoula, a growing urban center. Four main tributaries and numerous creeks flow into the river with diverse and complex connections to wilderness areas, national forests and private ranchlands in valley bottoms. Prairie grasslands, sagebrush steppe, coniferous forest, and extensive wetland and riparian areas characterize the internal reaches of the watershed. Over eighty percent of the watershed is covered with mixed species forests, with the remaining lands in agriculture, grasslands, wetlands and streams.

For more than a century, the mid-elevation ponderosa pine, Douglas fir and western larch forests and associated vegetative communities in the Blackfoot watershed have contributed significant biological, agricultural and cultural value to communities living across the valley. Beginning with Native Americans like the Salish, Kootenai and Blackfoot tribes to early homesteaders and ranchers, these forested habitats have provided forage and cover for wildlife, timber and other forest products, grazing, hunting and general recreation opportunities.

In 2003, recognizing the conservation value and increasing potential for habitat fragmentation of some of these mid-elevation private forest lands, the Blackfoot Challenge and The Nature Conservancy initiated a large-scale land acquisition effort known as the Blackfoot Community Project to purchase up to 88,000 acres of lands owned by Plum Creek Timber Company, stretching from the headwaters at Rogers Pass on the Continental Divide to the Clearwater drainage (Appendix A). The overall goal of the Blackfoot Community Project is to conserve and keep these former corporate timber lands relatively intact through re-sale to both public and private interests based on a community-driven plan. This land acquisition effort in turn paved the way for the development of the Blackfoot Community Conservation Area (BCCA).

The BCCA is located in the mid-reaches of the watershed, near Ovando Mountain (Maps I and II). Forming the southern border of the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat Wilderness Areas and north of the Blackfoot River, the area encompasses an important transition zone between wilderness, national forest and productive valley bottoms, with lush riparian and wetland areas and important wildlife habitat.

The BCCA project formed around what is now called the Core—5,609.37 acres of private working forest lands that will be transferred from The Nature Conservancy to the Blackfoot Challenge for community-based ownership and management. The acquisition is pioneering local governance and decision-making policies and procedures about sustainable forest management, and the intricate balance between conservation and community viability. Building from this effort, the Core will then be extended to include surrounding public and private lands to develop a multiple-use demonstration area for the watershed implementing innovative access, land stewardship and restoration practices across a 41,000-acre landscape. Land ownership is comprised of the USFS-Lolo National Forest, MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and a number of private landowners; a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will establish the legal framework for public agencies and private landowners to partner in cooperative cross-boundary ecosystem management. (Appendix B).

The project links social, ecological and economic values together, and is rooted in the efforts of the Blackfoot Challenge to bring public and private partners together to build trust and relationships, and work together to conserve, protect and enhance the natural resources and rural lifestyle of the Blackfoot River Valley. Hallmarks of the project will include building long-term capacity for land management activities, collaboration with partners, continued public engagement in the process, enhanced resource stewardship, economic benefits to local communities, adaptive management and monitoring, and education about best management practices

## Plan Purpose

The purpose of this document is to guide land management decisions on the BCCA Core – the 5609.37 acres located in the heart of the Blackfoot Community Conservation Area. The Plan defines the community’s vision for the property, characterizes the natural and cultural landscape, documents the public involvement process and administration of the property, and establishes management goals and objectives to guide conservation, restoration and stewardship activities. The Plan seeks to:

- Meet the requirements of the Conservation Easement held by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Identify the range of resource issues, values and uses that are key to sustainable management of the BCCA Core.
- Establish guidelines, measurable targets and funding priorities for annual management, stewardship and restoration projects.
- Emphasize the on-going balance and correlation between managing the landscape for both *community* and *conservation* purposes.
- Lay the foundation for cooperative ecosystem management of the 41,000-acre BCCA by public and private partners.
- Provide mechanisms for ongoing community engagement in ownership and management of the BCCA Core.
- Adapt as needed to integrate new knowledge and best available science in addition to ecological, social and economic changes that affect the landscape.

The Plan was developed by the Blackfoot Community Conservation Area Council, a community-based group appointed by the Blackfoot Challenge Board of Directors, with comments and input sought from Blackfoot Valley landowners, residents and user groups through public meetings, work groups, a survey and mailings. Community involvement and collaboration with public and private partners will continue to provide a solid foundation to this Plan and future management decisions.

A key reference document for the Plan is the Ovando Mountain Habitat Conservation Easement Baseline Inventory Report, completed in February 2007 (Appendix C). The Baseline Inventory documents current conditions as a reference point for future observations and measurements related to the landscape’s physical and biological characteristics.

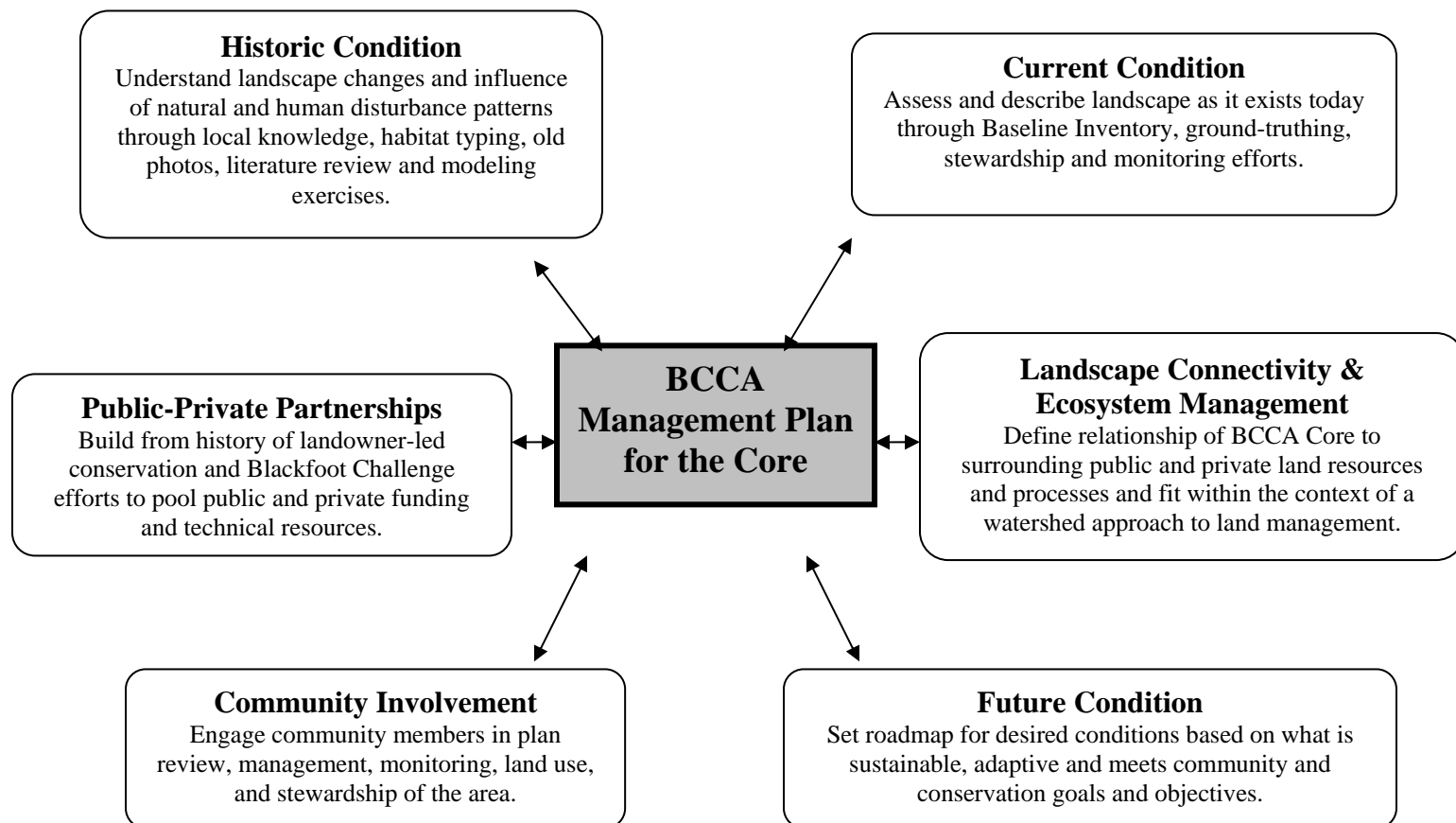
## Vision Statement

The overall *vision* for the BCCA Core is to:

*Develop a working landscape that balances ecological diversity with local economic sustainability for the future benefit of the Blackfoot Watershed Community. Management will entail activities that seek to conserve, enhance and maintain a balance of wildlife habitat, wetlands, water, grasslands and timber resources with traditional uses including hunting, recreation, agriculture, and forestry. These shared values for the land will be complimented through working cooperatively with the surrounding agency and private landowners.*

## Type of Plan

The Plan is intended to be a dynamic document that pools technical planning resources and local community-based knowledge with integration of the following key components, **all of equal value**:





## PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

### Legal Description of the Core

Township 15 North, Range 12 West, Montana Principal Meridian

Section 1: S1/2SW1/4, 80 Acres

Section 2: Govt. Lots 2-4, S1/2NW1/4, SW1/4, SW1/4NE1/4, W1/2SE1/4, SE1/4SE1/4, 515.45 Acres

Section 3: Govt. Lots 1-4, S1/2N1/2, S1/2, 634.80 Acres

Section 10: All, 640 Acres

Section 11: All, 640 Acres

Section 12: SW1/4NE1/4, W1/2NW1/4, SE1/4NW1/4, S1/2, 480 Acres

Section 13: All, 640 Acres

Section 14: NE1/4, E1/2NW1/4, S1/2, 560 Acres

Section 15: N1/2, N1/2SW1/4, SE1/4SW1/4, SE1/4, 600 Acres

Section 22: N/E1/4, 160 acres

Section 23: All less tract in E1/2NE1/4 containing 16.16 acres, 623.84 acres

Section 24: That portion of N1/2NE1/4 and the NE1/4NW1/4 described as follows: Beginning at the Northwest corner of the NE1/4NW1/4 of said Section 24, the point of beginning; thence South 439.56 feet, along the West line of the NE1/4NW1/4 of said Section 24; thence North 79 degrees 30 minutes East, 1902.12 feet; thence South 89 degrees East 949.54 feet; thence South 84 degrees East, 1204.43 feet, to a point on the East section line of said Section 24; thence North 246.84 feet along the East section line of said Section 24, to the Northeast section corner of said Section 24, thence West along the North section line of said Section 24, a distance of 3985.0 feet to the Northwest corner of the NE1/4NW1/4 of said Section 24, the point of beginning. Recorded in Book 60, Page 361, Deed records of Powell County, Montana. TOGETHER WITH a portion of the NW1/4NW1/4 of said Section 24, Township 15 North, Range 12 West, more particularly described as follows: Beginning at the Northwest corner of said Section 24; thence South 620 feet; thence North 86 degrees 49 minutes East, 1342 feet; thence North 446 feet; thence West 1328 feet to the point of beginning. Records in Book 53, Page 311, Deed records of Powell County, Montana. 35.28 acres.

### Directions to the Site

There are three gateways to the BCCA Core, with kiosks located at each entry point. From Highway 200, two gravel county roads access the property. To access the property from the west, turn onto the Monture Creek Road at mile marker 44 and travel approximately two miles. The first option is to enter through DNRC State Section 16. Turn right through a green gate and follow the road as it winds north to the Rodeo Park Gate. The second option is to continue past the green gate on the Monture Road for another 2 miles and to turn right onto McCabe Creek Road.

To access the property from the south, turn onto the Boot Tree Road which is located just before mile marker 46 and proceed north for 1.5 miles. Look for the Boot Tree! At this point, the road forks and you can either travel north 1.5 miles to the Board Gate (Martin Park) or south .5 miles to the Haul Road Gate. (For more information on public access, see Map III.)

## NATURAL LANDSCAPE

### Geography

The Blackfoot River Watershed is in the southwestern corner of what is known as the “Crown of the Continent” Ecosystem, an area of the northern US Rocky Mountains with large, contiguous blocks of public and private conservation lands. The Crown is one of the most natural and intact environments found in the lower 48 States. The Blackfoot Watershed, bounded on the north by the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat Wilderness areas, and on the south by the Garnet Mountain and the Clark Fork Valley, acts as the Crown’s base, providing an important biological connection to other mountain ranges and rivers in Montana.

The 1.5 million-acre Blackfoot River originates near Rogers Pass on the Continental Divide and ends at its confluence with the Clark Fork River just east of Missoula, Montana. The 41,000-acre BCCA, is located in the north-central region of the Blackfoot watershed, and is identified by Ovando Mountain (elevation 7,799 feet), a feature visible from much of the middle Blackfoot. The 5,609.37-acre Core encompasses the lower southwest slopes and foothills of Ovando Mountain, with elevations ranging from 4,200 to 5,200 feet.

Within the 41,000-acre BCCA are the headwaters to several tributaries of Monture Creek (a major tributary of the Blackfoot River) including McCabe, Spread, and Dick Creeks. Warren Creek and Spring Creek drain the south face of Ovando Mountain and surrounding foothills. The BCCA is bounded by Lake Creek on the northwest and the North Fork of the Blackfoot River on the southeast. The Core area includes portions of the Dick and Warren Creek drainages.

### Geology

The Blackfoot River Valley was formed by continental glaciation when the Cordilleran ice sheet advanced through northern Montana. Quaternary glaciation and sedimentary deposition has led to the Blackfoot Valley’s geologic complexity. Alpine glaciation in the Scapegoat Wilderness and mountains to the north of the valley occurred during the Bull Lake and Pinedale glacial periods. Large continuous ice sheets extended from the mountains southward into what is now the middle Blackfoot and Clearwater River valleys. Large deposits of till, outwash, and kame-terraces were left behind when the glaciers receded. More recent alluvium and stream deposits have originated from reworked glacial deposits, adding to the current geomorphology of the area. Formations are made up of a combination of volcanics, siltstone, carbonates, and glacial deposits. Glaciated features, such as terraces, alluvial fans and pothole wetlands, are common to the BCCA and the Core Area.

### Vegetation

Geologic, hydrologic, and geographic features combine to produce a wide array of vegetative communities within the Blackfoot Watershed. Low and mid-elevation forests are dominated by Ponderosa pine, lodgepole pine, Douglas-fir, and western larch. In the higher regions, forest composition shifts to subalpine-fir and Engelmann spruce, especially on cool moist northerly aspects. Floodplain forests are comprised of Engelmann spruce, black cottonwood and aspen. In the watershed’s valley floor, meadows and native bunchgrass prairies dominate the landscape. Here, rare species can be found, such as Missoula phlox and Howell’s gumweed, globally imperiled regional endemics with population core in the Ovando Valley, including the BCCA.

Portions of the middle Blackfoot Valley region are dominated by sagebrush communities. The greatest source of biological diversity in the watershed arises from wetland features such as glacial lakes, vernal ponds, basin fed creeks and spring creeks, marshes, shrubby riparian areas, and cottonwood forests – features which are common to the BCCA. It is estimated that 600 vascular plant species occur within the valley, nearly 30% of which are associated with wetlands. Salinity of pothole wetlands varies greatly, creating unique associations between water and vegetation. Seven plant species of special concern have been documented in wetlands of the Blackfoot region. Fen peatlands, a rare wetland type in Montana, also exist throughout the middle Blackfoot.

The vast majority of the watershed and the BCCA remain in native vegetation. Over 80% of the watershed is covered with mixed species conifer forests. The rest is comprised of 10% intact bunchgrass prairie; 5% agricultural lands, primarily tame grasses; and 5% in a combination of shrublands, wetlands, lakes and streams. Less than 1% of the watershed is dominated by developed areas. Within the BCCA, \_\_\_\_% is in conifer forest, \_\_\_\_% is in native prairie, and \_\_\_\_% is in riparian and wetland (need to get off of GIS NLCD). Within the Core Area, approximately 92% is in conifer forest, 5% is in grasslands, and 3% is in riparian and wetland.

## Wildlife

The Blackfoot watershed maintains an abundance and diversity of wildlife that includes 236 species of birds, 50 species of mammals, 5 species of amphibians, and 4 kinds of reptiles. There are 12 native and 13 non-native (exotic) fish species living in the streams and lakes of the watershed. The Blackfoot River is a world-renowned native trout fishery, providing habitat for the complete life cycles of westslope cutthroat trout, a state species of special concern, and the federally threatened bull trout. The threatened bald eagle, grizzly bear, Canada lynx, water howellia, and the endangered gray wolf are other federally listed species found in the Blackfoot. All of the threatened and endangered animal species occur on both the BCCA and the Core Area.

The valley's glacial pothole wetland complexes attract breeding and migratory birds. Of the 236 bird species known to occur in the valley, 12 species are of special concern. The river provides year round habitat for bald eagles and includes a number of nest sites. The Blackfoot Valley's riparian areas, wet meadows, and forests provide excellent grizzly bear habitat as well as supporting black bear, elk, deer, mountain lion, and forest carnivores. The Blackfoot as a whole is important to the integrity of the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem and provides crucial links for wildlife from this ecosystem to other landscapes on its southern periphery. The BCCA enhances and maintains the integrity of several wildlife habitat linkages.

## Surrounding Lands

Land ownership in the 41,000-acre BCCA is comprised of Lolo National Forest (59%), State of Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (7%), State of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (13%), private ownership (7%) and community-ownership of the Core through the Blackfoot Challenge (14%).

## CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

### Native American History

Prior to European settlement, the Salish, Kootenai and Blackfoot Tribes used forested areas like the BCCA for food, shelter, medicinal, and other cultural purposes. Here and elsewhere in the Northern Rockies, they used low-intensity fires to create habitat diversity. On the BCCA Core, local oral history accounts attest to... (Tim Ryan to help fill in history?)

### Ownership & Human Occupation

County records show that the BCCA Core was initially owned by Anaconda Forest Products and subsequently Champion International. In 1993, Plum Creek Timber Company acquired the land for timber management purposes. Plum Creek sold the property to The Nature Conservancy in January 2004 as part of the Blackfoot Community Project. A conservation easement was granted to the USFWS in 2005, preventing subdivision and development for residential, commercial or other industrial purposes. With the exception of one 80-acre in-holding, there are no residences or buildings on the BCCA Core.

### Land Uses & Values

Judging from oral history accounts and other documentation, the BCCA was used for a variety of purposes that were common across the Ovando and Helmville Valleys. The landscape provided resources for local ranches and farms including hunting and food gathering, livestock pasture, hay meadows, and firewood in addition to logging opportunities.

There are memories of hard winters, hunting expeditions, bobsled travel to the Monture Schoolhouse, root cellars storing potatoes and cabbage. The first major logging in the 1950s by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company include stories of logging camps, big old red Macks, and corduroy roads, Rosignohl's landing strip and the Cat Shed located at the Rodeo Park. Local names like "The Blind Corners and the Cattle Guard," "Duck Pond Hill," and "Red Fender Corner," as well as "Muchmore Park," "Valiton Ridge" and the "Moonshine Cabin" were never put on maps but were definite landmarks and reference points of their time. The area offered a variety of opportunities such as families gathering gunnysacks of pine cones for sale by the bushel and cutting of firewood. Besides local livestock gathering, large bands of sheep from the Pauly Ranch pastured from Deer Lodge through Helmville to Ovando Mountain and west to Placid Lake as summer range.

There are also memories of several old cabins scattered across the landscape with some long-forgotten mines and numerous outfitting camps. Starting on the east side of the property, Swede Hansen's cabin was located between the Haul Road and the river. Traveling west, the Doney family also came to the area in the 1890's and homesteaded on what is now East Warren Creek. Other ownerships located along the BCCA border included Elija Hoyt, Anton Jacobsen, Elmer Staves, Henry McNally, Clate Johnson, Claire Eaton and Joseph Hanzel.

## PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT & ADMINISTRATION

### Participation Process

Public input and community involvement has been a critical component to both the Blackfoot Community Project and the Blackfoot Community Conservation Area. In December 2002, nearly nine months prior to the signed agreement between The Nature Conservancy and Plum Creek Timber Company, the Blackfoot Challenge hosted a community meeting in Ovando to acquire local feedback on acquisition of up to 88,000 acres of timberlands and the development of a community-based disposition plan. Subsequently, the Challenge hosted follow-up meetings in Ovando, Greenough, Seeley Lake, Helmville and Lincoln between February and May 2003 to develop a list of community preferences for re-sale of the proposed project lands. At each meeting, landowners and community members were given a project update, an overview of the lands proposed for purchase and most importantly were asked to comment on a variety of issues including grazing leases, timber management, public access, natural resources, development, cooperative management, and private versus public ownership.

As part of the process, in May 2003, community members met in Ovando to discuss the opportunity of developing a community conservation area at the base of Ovando Mountain. Landowners expressed support of keeping the area open for future generations and maintaining traditional uses including grazing, sustainable timber management, public access through block management, foot and horseback use and snowmobile trails. They also highlighted the value of the area for wildlife habitat and travel.

The next phase of public participation involved the distribution of a mail survey to local landowners and residents in the Ovando and Helmville areas in October 2004 (Appendix D). A total 347 surveys were successfully mailed of which 193 were returned by the closing date. The purpose of the survey was to collect information on the opinions of landowners related to future use, ownership and management of the Blackfoot Community Conservation Area Core. The survey helped provide a baseline for community thoughts and concerns related to the project.

Implementation of the Blackfoot Community Project and BCCA continues to involve direct participation of local landowners and residents through committees, work groups, one-on-one discussions, a semi-annual newsletter and website updates.

### Establishing the Blackfoot Community Conservation Area Council

A key strategy for engaging the public in the BCCA project was the development of the BCCA Council, a committee appointed to represent the broader community, establish and oversee the management policies and practices for the area. In early 2005, an ad-hoc working group comprised of Blackfoot Challenge board and community members met to establish a slate of candidates and process for appointment to the BCCA Council. Some of these candidates were derived from survey responses of those folks interested in a high level of participation in the project. Others were derived from community mailings and updates. The major qualification necessary to serve on the Council was the interest in the area and a commitment to serve the community for a two-year period.

Based on the ad-hoc working group's recommendations, the Blackfoot Challenge Board of Directors appointed a 15-member Blackfoot Community Conservation Area Council in July 2005. To represent the diversity of community values and opinions, the BCCA Council is comprised of 1) five agency representatives who own or manage land adjacent to the Core (the Seeley Lake District

Ranger of the U.S.F.S., the H2-O Ranch Manager of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Supervisor of the Southwest Area of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (or that person's designee), the Blackfoot Biologist for the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks, and the Blackfoot Stewardship Coordinator for The Nature Conservancy which will become a Blackfoot Challenge representative upon change in ownership), 2) five landowners divided between those that represent newer, non-traditional landowners and generational ranchers, and 3) five individuals representing recreational user groups, local businesses and/or commercial outfitters.

The BCCA Council held their first meeting in August 2005 and has convened numerous work group sessions. Each of the Council members plays an instrumental role in the project, building trust and relationship and working towards consensus on a range of management issues, values and uses for the benefit of the BCCA core and the community.

## Administrative Structure

### **I. BCCA Council Membership**

(a) The Blackfoot Community Conservation Area shall be managed and administered by BCCA Council, a committee of the Blackfoot Challenge, consisting of 15 members that represent three separate Categories:

*Category 1:* Agencies who own or manage land adjacent to the Core, specifically the US Forest Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the Blackfoot Challenge;

*Category 2:* Private landowners, and

*Category 3:* Recreational groups, local businesses, or commercial outfitters;

All members shall be appointed by the Blackfoot Challenge Board of Directors for a term of two years.

(b) Agency members may serve consecutive terms. Members representing Categories 2 and 3 of private landowners and recreational groups are eligible for up to two consecutive terms. After a duration of two years not serving on the Council, members may seek re-appointment to the Council.

(c) Council members are encouraged to attend meetings regularly and to provide notice of absence.

### **2. BCCA Council Appointment**

(a) The Blackfoot Challenge Board of Directors will solicit nominations from the community to represent Categories 2 and 3 of private landowners and recreational groups to appoint to the Council. Criteria for selection will be based primarily on three criteria: 1) the individual's ability to be an active participant for their term of appointment, 2) the willingness to work positively and cooperatively to reach management decisions that best meet the goals of the BCCA, and 3) diversity of representation.

(b) Initially two members each representing private landowners and recreational users will be selected for one year terms – to be determined by drawing lots after appointment. This arrangement will ensure that no more than one-half of the Council will be replaced at any one time. The terms will be appointed on a calendar year basis (multiple options here – need to discuss).

### **3. Charge of the BCCA Council**

(a) The charge of the BCCA Council is to 1) develop and implement the Management Plan for the Core, 2) develop an annual budget and work plan for the Core, 3) fundraise for the annual budget and special projects, 4) consider community proposals for uses or projects on the BCCA Core, 5) develop an MOU to coordinate management of the 41,000-acre BCCA.

(b) The Board of Directors of the Blackfoot Challenge retains authority for: 1) approval of the Management Plan for the Core, 2) approval of the annual budget and work plan for the Core, 3) approval of membership, new appointments and dissolution of the BCCA Council, 4) endorsement of the MOU for the 41,000-acre BCCA; and 5) liability coverage, administrative and general support for the BCCA Council.

### **4. Committee Structure**

(a) The Council will have a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson, and a Secretary/Treasurer that will be appointed on an annual basis by the Council. The three officers must represent two of the three categories of Council membership.

(b) The Council will have a part-time Land Steward (by contract or partnership efforts) to coordinate and implement on-the-ground projects defined in the annual workplan.

(c) The Council will have a Management Committee to provide day-to-day oversight of the Land Steward and annual work plan activities. The management committee will be comprised of three members representing each of the categories of Council membership and will be appointed on an annual basis.

(d) The Blackfoot Challenge Board of Directors will provide staff support to assist the Council as deemed necessary by the Board and Council. If the Council desires, the staff coordinator or another person designated by the Blackfoot Challenge Board of Directors will assist with Council meetings and stewardship projects.

(e) The Council will establish a meeting schedule that enables them to conduct their duties in an open and efficient manner. All meetings will be open to the general public, who will be afforded an opportunity to speak at the meeting.

### **5. Decision-Making & Voting**

(a) The Council will endeavor to reach management decision through consensus. To assist in realizing this goal, the Council will use the “thumbs rule” when a vote is required. Council members in favor of the decision or proposal will give a thumbs up; those folks that are may not be in favor the decision or proposal but can accept it in spirit of compromise will give a thumbs sideways to indicate their position; and finally those Council members that cannot accept the decision or proposal as presented will give a thumbs down. If a Council member gives a thumbs down, they will have the responsibility of presenting an alternate proposal that may meet the needs of all the Council members.

(b) If the Council is unable to reach a decision using the “thumbs rule,” a decision shall be decided by a majority of votes of the members present and absent, requiring 80 percent approval for passage – 12 yea votes with at least 3 positive votes from each membership category.

### Community Engagement

The Council will provide ample opportunities for public involvement and engagement in future land management and stewardship of the BCCA. Key strategies for community engagement include the following:

- The public will be notified about and encouraged to attend BCCA Council meetings.
- Public meetings will be held annually to report Council actions and to gather comments, feedback and ideas. On certain projects and issues that warrant immediate feedback from the broader community, the Council will host special community meetings to acquire input.
- Communication and outreach tools will be developed to update the community on BCCA activities, i.e. newsletter, Blackfoot Challenge website, and post office notices.
- Community events and tours will be hosted on the BCCA Core to familiarize the public with the land.
- Members of the community will have the opportunity to be appointed to and serve on the BCCA Council as specified in term rotation procedures above.

### Community Proposals

Community members may develop and submit proposals to the BCCA Council for special projects and uses. The proposal must include a project summary, scope of the area affected by the use, number of users, timeframe and duration of use, and address liability. The Council will assess whether the request increases or expands the level of existing uses OR creates new uses on the BCCA Core. A set of general guidelines and criteria will be used to examine whether the use is compatible with the Management Plan for the Core (Appendix E).



## MANAGEMENT GOALS & OBJECTIVES

### Overview

The overarching purpose of the Plan is to establish a management direction for the BCCA Core for implementation of annual restoration and stewardship projects. This section identifies eleven resource issues, values and uses with desired conditions for sustainable management of the BCCA Core. It also establishes guidelines, measurable targets and funding priorities to implement projects.

The natural and community resources that are central to management of the Core include: Wildlife, Forest & Forest products, Fire, Riparian & Wetland areas, Range & Native Grasslands, Weeds, Recreation, Travel Management, Education, In-holdings & Neighbors, and Economics. Each resource follows with management goals, objectives and issues requiring future study.

A number of social and biological assessments provide the foundation to this section of the Plan, including 1) the BCCA Survey, 2004 (Appendix D), 2) the Ovando Mountain Land Management Evaluation, 2005, 3) the Ovando Mountain Habitat Conservation Easement Baseline Inventory Report, 2007 (Appendix C), 4) the Lolo National Management Plan Revision, 2007, 5) management policies and activities during TNC ownership (Appendix F), in addition to BCCA monthly and other public meetings.

The Nature Conservancy played a pivotal role in helping set a precedent for restoration and sustainable management of the diversity of resources on the BCCA Core.

### WILDLIFE

The BCCA Core is an important wildlife area, providing excellent habitat for a wide variety of species due to its topographic, vegetative and hydrologic diversity. The area provides an important transition zone between mid to high elevation forests and private valley bottoms and has been identified as having high values for wildlife linkage based on travel routes wildlife currently use and the proximity of public lands (Ovando Land Management Evaluation, 2005).

#### Management Goal

To manage habitat that will promote diverse and sustainable populations of wildlife.

#### Objectives

1. Maintain identified wildlife travel corridors through the Core.
2. Maintain and/or recruit forested cover of large diameter trees for raptor nesting sites by promoting uneven-aged timber management for the appropriate tree species.
3. Maintain range of forested forage such as tree lichen and under story grasses, sedges and shrubs for elk, whitetail, mule deer and moose on year-round basis.
4. Maintain and recruit large diameter snags and standing burned trees to provide nesting and forage habitat for cavity nesting birds and arboreal mammals. (Trees will be marked and off-limit to firewood cutting.)
5. Maintain and recruit large woody deadfall for small mammal populations.
6. Manage for a generally mature forest structure that is critical for elk escape cover by retaining adequate large diameter trees, carrying medium-sized saw timber trees to larger diameters (20 inch DBH and larger), and thinning pole-sized stands to increase growth rates in retained trees.
7. Maintain and expand aspen stands particularly for cavity nesters by 1) cutting aspen only to stimulate re-sprouting, 2) removing coniferous competition within and surrounding aspen stands, and 3) foregoing the use of herbicides that will suppress or kill aspen.

8. Identify sensitive elk calving areas and implement seasonal closures to motorized vehicles (May 1-July 15).
9. Manage habitat for threatened and endangered species.
10. Conduct wildlife surveys to monitor diversity of species and habitat requirements.
11. Update and maintain list of wildlife species found on the Core.

#### Issues requiring future study

1. Assess special species needs not being fulfilled by above management.

## FOREST & FOREST PRODUCTS

A tremendous amount of vegetative diversity is evident on the BCCA Core, with 92% characterized as coniferous forest. According to the Baseline Inventory Report, over the past 75 years almost all of the merchantable timber was harvested (with the exception of hardwoods). Timber harvest regimes included selective logging with some areas that appear to have been clear-cut. Some limited areas that approach old growth condition can be found along Dick Creek and in the western portions of Sections 12 and 13. Currently, small younger trees dominate the landscape in many areas. Natural and artificial regeneration have resulted in very successful reforestation of the property.

#### Management Goal

To manage for a diverse multi-age forest using sustainable forestry practices.

#### Objectives

1. Maintain and recruit forested cover of large diameter trees.
2. Maintain and recruit large diameter snags and burned trees.
3. Maintain and expand aspen stands.
4. Follow State of Montana Best Management Practices and Streamside Management Zone regulations on all timber treatments.
5. Pre-commercially thin timber on the most productive forest stands with the highest growth potential to manage for diversity of species.

#### Issues requiring future study

1. Identify existing forest stands that are limited in scope or size and develop silvicultural prescriptions to increase their range and vitality.
2. Develop general silvicultural prescription plans for each of the eight stand types identified in the BCCA Core Inventory.
3. Delineate Management Units within the eight stand types.
4. Identify and prioritize stands where pre-commercial thinning will be required.
5. Using the forest inventory and rates of growth, identify sustainable harvests for the BCCA Core.

## FIRE

Wildfire can play an important role in maintaining diverse plant communities. However, the proximity of the BCCA Core to private lands and structures requires that extreme caution be exercised in utilizing fire as a forest management tool. On three occasions in 2006 and 2007, DNRC fire crews, as well as the Ovando Volunteer Fire Department, were called upon to suppress human-caused fires on the BCCA. The early part of the fall hunting season is the time when the area is most likely to have problems with human-caused fires, as recreational use is at its highest then. Controlled fire or fire-surrogates may be used in the future to manage plant growth and forest recovery as time and resources allow.

## Management Goal

To manage fuel levels utilizing prescribed fire, thinning or other land management practices to reduce the chance of catastrophic wildfire.

## Objectives

1. Continue fire protection agreement with the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.
2. Suppress all wildfires on the BCCA Core to protect life, resources and property.
3. Utilize prescribed fire or fire surrogates to enhance forest health and fire protection.

## Issues requiring future study

1. The development of a BCCA “Strike Team” to conduct prescribed burns on the BCCA.
2. Identify specific areas for the demonstration burns listed above.

## RIPARIAN & WETLAND AREAS

While only encompassing approximately 3% of the Core Area, riparian and wetland areas are of utmost importance to the health of the larger area and its plant and animal inhabitants. Areas range from streamside belts to large numbers of glacial moraine potholes with water near the surface in late summer, and evident above the surface in the spring.

## Management Goal

Implement riparian and wetland restoration and conservation strategies to benefit local fisheries and downstream resources and users.

## Objectives

1. Remove native fish passage barriers, providing connectivity from tributaries to the Blackfoot River.
2. Make improvements to riparian and wetland areas as resources permit.
3. Protect water sources, such as springs and pothole wetlands, from grazing and livestock watering impacts.

## Issues requiring future study

1. Identify those wetlands and water sources that are critical for livestock water and/or that need protection.
2. Identify any wetland/riparian areas that are unique on the BCCA and develop a plan for protection and enhancement.
3. Monitor riparian/wetland areas that may be in need of protection or special management practices (fencing, season of grazing, etc.)

## RANGE & NATIVE GRASSLANDS

Range and native grasslands comprise 5% of the BCCA Core. Discrete communities exist including Mollet Park, Martin Park, Doney Meadows and McNally Meadows. The dominant habitat type of the major grassland parks is rough fescue/Idaho fescue (excluding Doney Meadows which is dominated by timothy). There are also significant scattered “range areas,” where forage is available due to logging clearings or open-canopy forest types.

## Management Goal

To promote healthy range management practices while balancing the ecological and economic values of the area.

## Objectives

1. Enhance native range conditions where native plant communities are determined to be in a degraded condition through livestock rotation, pasture rest, weed control, controlled burning or other suitable means.
2. Conduct range inventories as needed to assess range conditions and sustainable livestock stocking rates for grazing leases.
3. Monitor livestock and wildlife grazing in order to manage for healthy range conditions.
4. Where revegetation is necessary, use only weed-seed-free native plant seed mixes.
5. Remove conifer encroachment on grasslands by hand or mechanically treating, and burning where possible.

#### Issues requiring future study

1. Identify those watering sites on grazing leases that are critical for livestock watering.
2. Identify wetlands and riparian areas where livestock watering and use is detrimental to the resource.
3. Identify sources of funding for grazing-related projects on the area.
4. Determine best monitoring protocols for grazing leases (i.e. who, where, what, when).

### - WEEDS -

In many areas across the Core, noxious weeds are prevalent, particularly along roadsides, old logging decks and slash piles. The principal noxious weeds are spotted knapweed, common toadflax, houndstouge, sulfur cinquefoil, common tansy, Canada thistle, and St. Johnswort. No leafy spurge or hawkweed infestations are known at this time. There are also populations of the following invasive weeds: musk and bull thistles, reed canarygrass, cheatgrass, bulbous bluegrass, and common mullein.

#### Management Goal

To prevent, control and/or eradicate invasive and noxious weed infestations through the practice of integrated weed management.

#### Objectives

1. Participate in the Blackfoot Weed Management Project with Powell County Weed District, as a landowner within the Middle Blackfoot and North Fork Weed Management Areas.
2. Treat new invader species as highest priority for eradication and control.
3. Control weeds along all travel routes; monitor all travel routes for control needs on an annual basis.
4. Spot treat and monitor sensitive native plant communities, such as riparian areas and native grasslands.
5. Utilize an integrated weed management approach including chemical application, biocontrol, revegetation, grazing, hand-pulling, mowing, and other innovative practices.
6. Require the use of weed-seed-free livestock feed by the recreating public, as well as weed-seed-free mixes for revegetation efforts.

#### Issues requiring future study

1. Develop requirements for washing/cleaning vehicles traveling or using the BCCA Core.
2. Specific mapping of invader species.
3. Develop priority areas for weed treatment (and possible non-treatment).
4. Map existing aspen stands so that chemical herbicide treatments can be directed away from them.

## - RECREATION -

The BCCA Core provides a range of recreation opportunities including hunting, trapping, fishing, wildlife viewing, hiking, horseback riding, camping, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, mountain biking, snowmobiling, dogsledding, berry gathering and other activities. In particular, it has the highest use of all Block Management Areas in MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks Region 2. The main snowmobile route connecting Seeley Lake and Lincoln traverse the BCCA Core. Dogsledders also use the area.

### Management Goal

To provide for responsible use at sustainable levels to benefit the public and the **health of the resource**.

### Objectives

1. Maintain and enforce the Public Use and Recreation Policy which incorporates objectives detailed herein.
2. Allow for a range of appropriate and sustainable forms of non-motorized public recreation, such as hiking, biking, horseback riding, hunting and camping, at all times of the year.
3. Allow for reasonable and sustainable motorized public access to the Core lands while promoting the health of all of the resources of the Core lands. Access is limited to open, established roads. Some roads may be seasonally closed due to sensitive wildlife areas, to accommodate grazing lessees and road conditions.
4. Develop and maintain infrastructure necessary to support and manage recreational uses, such as roads, parking areas, gates, trails, camping areas and signage.
5. Work with local user groups and MTFWP to maintain existing snowmobile trail system.
6. Allow non-commercial, legal, and sustainable animal and plant harvest (including firewood and Christmas tree gathering) by the public.
7. Cooperate with MTFWP to ensure that the Ovando Mountain Block Management Area is well managed and consistent with the Core's resource management and recreation objectives (Appendix G).
8. To minimize conflicts with bears, human, pet and livestock food, garbage and all other attractants shall be acceptably stored at all times (in accordance with the Lolo National Forest Food/Attractant Order #F06-003-LOLO-D6, Appendix H). Attractants shall not be buried, discarded or burned in an open campfire.
9. Educate and encourage recreationists to not introduce or exacerbate the spread of noxious and invasive weeds.
10. Educate and encourage recreationists to leave the Core in as clean or a cleaner condition than they found it.
11. Allow for reasonable special-use-permits, on a case-by-case basis, for educational, community and commercial uses.
12. Monitor recreational use and impacts to the resource, including motorized and hunting use.

### Issues requiring future study

1. Cooperate with agencies to fund and research annual hunting and trapping harvest numbers and big game herds on the BCCA.
2. Assess the impacts of off-trail snowmobile use on other forms of recreation, soils, wildlife, and plants communities.

## - TRAVEL MANAGEMENT -

Two primary roads traverse the property including the Ovando Haul Road and the Fireline Road. Public access is managed through a variety of open, seasonally open, closed roads and trails (Map III).

### Management Goal

To maintain a trail and road network for various forms and levels of administrative and recreational use that does not unduly degrade identified natural resource values.

### Objectives

1. Provide for and maintain gates or other road closure devices, parking areas, signage, and maps at major entry points to the BCCA.
2. Maintain three classes of public and administrative-use roads, which are:
  - Class 1: Open roads, which are open year-round to motorized public use.
  - Class 2: Restricted use roads, which are principle administrative routes, and which are open to the public for motorized use only during specific times of the year.
  - Class 3: Closed roads, which are other administrative routes that are closed to wheeled motorized use by the public on a year-round basis.
3. Encourage non-motorized public uses such as skiing, hiking and horseback riding and investigate the development of signed trail routes.
4. Monitor various road and trail uses to ensure that uses are balanced, and levels of use are compatible with each other and the resources of the Core lands.
5. Maintain seasonal motorized use closures to protect sensitive wildlife resources.

### Issues requiring future study

1. Explore development of signed loop route from the Board Gate to Mollet Park and back utilizing existing Class 3 roads and/or short connector trails.
2. Plow parking areas in winter.
3. Explore construction of a horse/hiking trail to the summit of Ovando Mtn.

## - EDUCATION -

One of the key priorities for the BCCA is to utilize the area for education, research and learning opportunities to demonstrate innovative land management and restoration practices and partnerships.

### Management Goal

To promote natural resource education and research opportunities for learning about local ecology and management through field observations, hands-on exploration and interaction with resource managers and researchers.

### Objectives

1. Engage local schools in projects related to the BCCA Core, with opportunities for biologists and agency representatives involved in land management on BCCA to share observations in classrooms.
2. Encourage use of the BCCA Core as a demonstration site for innovative land management practices.
3. Develop baseline of natural and cultural change over time.
4. Encourage research by local universities on the BCCA Core.

### Issues requiring future study

1. Document cultural and natural history (i.e. logging, grazing, historic Rodeo Grounds, cabin sites, etc.) with schools and community.
2. Explore Adopt-An-Acre project.

3. Explore opportunity to develop BCCA as outdoor learning site, with education trail, and work with BC Education Committee to develop other education projects that reach local teachers and schools, landowners, recreationists and visitors to the watershed.

### - IN-HOLDINGS & NEIGHBORS -

#### Management Goal

To maintain a positive relationship with landowners who have in-holdings, adjacent and neighboring parcels of land.

#### Objectives

1. Facilitate regular communication with neighbors.

### - ECONOMICS -

The rural communities of the Blackfoot watershed are experiencing shifts in demographics and economic structure. Although many of these changes are occurring at a regional scale, the BCCA Core provides the opportunity to link community viability with natural resource sustainability. Opportunities exist including utilizing the wood processing facility in Seeley Lake to providing recreation and tourism activities for local restaurants, inns and guest ranches to hiring local contractors to complete projects on the Core.

#### Management Goal

To be an economically self-sustaining unit that reflects our local cultural heritage and explores innovative funding strategies.

#### Objectives

1. Develop long-term financial plan to fund annual costs for BCCA Core land management and stewardship.
2. Support local businesses, mills, forest and natural resource workers as opportunities arise.

#### Issues requiring future study

1. Explore funding opportunities related to natural resource and recreation income, future growth, capacity and/or funding partnerships with agencies and other non-profit organizations.

## MONITORING AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

The BCCA Council recognizes the need to evaluate actions taken under this Management Plan and to adapt management based on monitoring, landscape changes, or new information. Monitoring would come from a variety of sources and include both implementation and effectiveness monitoring. Implementation monitoring would track whether or not management actions were following the direction of the Plan by meeting objectives or addressing issues (identified on pages 14-20 of the plan). Through effectiveness monitoring, the community and Council will evaluate if the Management Plan is moving the BCCA towards the goals identified for each resource.

The BCCA will cooperate in existing programs that monitor land management practices in Montana. Forest management projects would be subject to Best Management Practices Audits, administered by the Montana DNRC. On federal and state land within the BCCA, monitoring activities will follow existing agency plans and regulations. Monitoring will also utilize information from research publications, government agencies, and local experts. For example, BCCA may confer with FWP (Fish, Wildlife, and Parks) about fish or wildlife population data in order to prioritize habitat improvement projects within the watershed. The BCCA may also develop a community monitoring program, focused on the BCCA Core Area.

An annual update will summarize each year's monitoring results for the community, the BCCA Council, and the Blackfoot Challenge. A record of completed activities will be maintained by Blackfoot Challenge staff. The scope and detail of landscape monitoring will be determined as funding allows.

Adaptive management is the process by which the BCCA Management Plan can be revised based on the results of monitoring. Potential changes to the Plan will be reviewed by the community, approved by the Council and presented to the Blackfoot Challenge with the annual update report.